

in its determination, how the forces of selection impinge on it and how it is changing—if it is changing—as the development of society alters these forces.”

C. O. C.

PRENATAL INFLUENCES

Montagu, Ashley. *Life before Birth*. London, 1964. Longmans Green. Pp. xi + 244. Price 25s.

THIS BOOK IS a condensed and popular version of the author's highly important and pioneering work, *Prenatal Influences*, which appeared in the USA in 1962.

In the past there has been a tendency to equate the congenital with the genetic, but knowledge won in the past few decades has revealed that environmental influences are strongly operative between conception and birth. Nowhere is that more so than in the first twelve weeks of intrauterine life during which basic organic structures are being shaped. Organogenesis is a fateful process, for what is then involved may often be more ultimately decisive, for good or ill, than any events throughout the whole life span which succeeds it. It is a finding of profound significance that diseases, drugs and other factors supervening in early pregnancy, whose influences are negligible concerning the mother herself, are prone to exert seriously inimical effects on the embryo within her; the classical examples, of course, are rubella and thalidomide.

Dr. Ashley Montagu here presents with great clarity and force material which strongly suggests that many other factors involving such things as nutrition, emotional disturbances, mother's age, fatigue, premature birth, Caesarian delivery, X rays, drugs, anaesthetics, vaccinations, immunizations, smoking and seasonal factors of a climatic kind may be concerned with the domestic tragedies involving abnormalities which so often wreak havoc with family life.

Too often a fatalistic or complacent attitude has been shown towards these matters, even on the part of physicians and family counsellors. Happily in the last few years signs have emerged of a new spirit bent upon elucidating the causes of congenital abnormalities and upon bringing

into play the preventive measures which represent fundamental remedies. The world in this connection owes yet another great debt to the late President John Kennedy, who in 1961, initiated a long term, nation wide project for the study of the factors responsible for mental retardation and allied conditions. In doing so he administered a salutary shock to American opinion, which other western countries have surely no less reason for taking to heart. He pointed out that about five million Americans suffered from mental retardation and that this problem was a serious personal matter to at least one out of every twelve people, disabling ten times as many as diabetes, twenty times as many as tuberculosis, twenty-five times as many as muscular dystrophy and 600 times as many as infantile paralysis, (*New York Times*, 12.10. 1961).

Nor do these alarming figures represent the limits of the problem. As Dr. Montagu shows, there is reason for believing that adverse prenatal influences which are difficult or impossible clearly to demonstrate directly, may be responsible for lesser, subclinical damage involving impairment of intelligence and of biological fitness revealed in a shortening of the total life span. Such an hypothesis seems concordant with the estimate of Mackenzie that if minor as well as major disabilities are included no less than one child in ten suffers from some physical or mental handicap, "the majority of disabilities being congenitally determined". (*Proc. R. Soc. Med.*, 1960, 53, 9). By far the greatest proportion of such disabilities listed by Mackenzie involved the central nervous system.

In 1961, Dr. Richard Maslund of the National Institute of Health in the USA, who is now leading President Kennedy's campaign, suggested that even on the basis of existing knowledge it is possible to carry out measures effective to reduce the overall incidence of unfavourable pregnancies resulting in congenital abnormalities. He went on to list under seven headings, a number of ostensibly common sense measures, hygienic, medical, contraceptive, dietetic and psychological, which would appear to hold promise in reducing the tragic toll of the congenitally defective (in *Prevention of Mental*

Disorders in Children. 1961. Ed. G. Caplan). To achieve the implementation of such principles, popular education, enlightenment and co-operation are indispensable. In furtherance of those means, Dr. Ashley Montagu has performed a notable service in writing this book. One must wish that it could become obligatory reading for every potential mother—and husband. The reviewer has but one fault to find. Nowhere is there given here details of the twenty-seven other books written by Dr. Montagu, many of which are important and worthy of study; this applies particularly to his *Direction of Human Development* which is of major significance concerning ways and means of raising not only the biological, but the moral potential of man.

HERBERT BREWER

MENTAL HEALTH

Hare, E. H. and Shaw, G. K. *Mental Health on a New Housing Estate*. Institute of Psychiatry; Maudsley Monographs 12. London, 1965. Oxford University Press. Pp. ix+135. Price 38s.

THE AUTHORS OF this monograph, both psychiatrists attached to the Maudsley Hospital, have made a study of the comparative health of two districts in Croydon. One of these is a new housing estate of mostly council houses built between 1948–1960 in an elevated position on the town's periphery, the other is a densely populated area in the heart of Croydon, where most of the houses were built before the First World War and are of low rateable value.

Members of a 10 per cent sample of households in the two populations were visited by doctors with psychiatric experience and eight other trained interviewers. The information sought from them and other sources was extensive. It covered general health, physical disturbances, and state of mental health, estimated from the amount of neurotic illness, single nervous symptoms and disturbances interfering with recent activities or leading to a visit to the doctor. The social attitudes of the members of the two populations were also recorded. General practitioners were approached to ascertain the extent and diagnosis of conditions about which the respondents had

consulted them. The in-patient and out-patient records of local hospitals and the records of psychiatric hospitals were investigated. Data were collected about the mental and physical health of the children in the families studied.

Checks and cross references showed that the morbidity rates were reliable; and that interviewer bias had affected the observations only where subjective judgement of personality and psychiatric manifestations had been called for.

The main findings did not demonstrate any important differences between the mental health of the population of the new housing estate and that of the older area; there was, however, in both, a significant association between mental ill-health and poor physical health. This negative finding is important. Earlier investigators, Martin, Brotherston and Chave, who had found the rates of mental illness on a new housing estate to be above the national average, concluded that this was in part due to the unsatisfactory social conditions peculiar to a new estate, in contrast to well-settled areas. The inquiry by Shaw and Hare lends no support to this explanation.

HILDA LEWIS

SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR

Ellis, Albert and Abarbanel, Albert (Editors). *The Encyclopaedia of Sexual Behaviour*. 2 Vols. New York, 1961. Hawthorn Books. (London, Corsano). Pp. i+574; viii+575–1059. Price 119s. 6d.

THE EDITORS STATE in the preface that this encyclopaedia took over three years to compile and claim that it is the first of its type ever published. Their claim is a legitimate one and the method of presentation practical and convenient.

Instead of having a great number of comparatively small paragraphs on many subjects it was decided to concentrate on about 200 major topics, each one covered by authoritative writers in scientific, professional, literary or artistic fields.

No claim is made that the subject is fully covered—to do this could have extended the work to ten or twenty volumes.